



Twenty-First Session of the Committee on Forestry/ Third World Forest Week

Wangari Maathai Award Ceremony
Thursday, 27 September 2012 (11:00 hours)
Red Room

Welcome address by Eduardo Rojas, ADG, FO and Chair of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF)

Exactly a year ago today, the world lost a unique woman, Wangari Maathai, who had devoted her entire life to raise the awareness of our dependence on trees and forests. She fought with all her strength to preserve the remaining forests and trees in her home country, Kenya, across Africa and the World. She led innumerable initiatives to replant trees and these, thanks to her perseverance, have upscaled throughout the World. Her efforts were tireless, and her goal was simple: to make her fellow citizens understand that forests and trees are a part of their lives, help deepen them. This embraced not only forests in its material sense including vital environmental services but was substantively driven by transcendent perspective with strong cultural and spiritual connotations. In order to restore the tree cover she used a people-based approach, something that in those days was not as self-evident as now.

Wangari Maathai broke many records. She was the first S&E-African woman ever to graduate as a PhD and was also the first African woman to be awarded Nobel Peace Award. But, for her, planting trees or advocating peace meant much more than the physical planting or the absence of violence. Planting trees was a way to reconcile people with their origins.

Wangari Maathai has become a symbol of civil courage against injustice and damage to collective assets as a key element of the overall heritage of a country. She has been inspirational for the growing awareness of the potential role of women in developing countries. She set up important civil society organizations like the Green Belt Movement and other initiatives in Africa. She was a woman who, through her determination contributed to change the World. The future we want could not be understood and will not be achieved without women like Wangari Maathai.

I had the extraordinary privilege of knowing her personally in her last year of life. We shared a press conference during the launch of the IYF in early February 2011. Despite her already weak health,

the strength of her personality shone through. I would like to request you now to watch with me the WM tribute film video.

The Collaborative Partnership on Forests understood that Wangari Maathai's intellectual and social legacy merited a relevant award that would keep her memory alive for future generations while recognizing examples of work similar to hers in all regions of the World. I thank the 14 members of the CPF for their support to the establishment of this award. The CPF wants to call the Wangari Maathai award every 2 years so I request you to spread it out in order to find the best candidate in the years to come, especially from Africa and/or women. After a thoughtful process and deliberation by an independent and highly respected jury, may I share with you the winner of the first edition of the CPF-Wangari Maathai Award:

May I introduce Dr. Narayan Kaji Shrestha from Nepal. Some of you may recognize Kaji from his passionate interventions on community forest issues in Nepal at international forestry events. What you may not know is that Kaji has worked behind the scenes for many years to ensure the growth and success of the community forestry movement in Nepal. When Kaji began promoting community forestry, land in Nepal was expected to be barren by the mid-1990s. Kaji worked passionately to reverse this trend. He: guided early attempts to create a more participatory approach to community decision-making, reaching out to women and low-caste villagers; initiated the first user-managed community forestry group in 1984; challenged afforestation projects in the mid-1980's to reassess what they were doing, why and for whom; influenced legislation and government training on forests; and provided leadership to the national organization that became FECOFUN, the Federation of Community Forestry Users in Nepal. He assisted the FECOFUN leadership for many years and remains a guide and mentor to many practitioners and leaders involved in participatory resource management. His work captures the spirit of Wangari Maathai's – his vision, courage, commitment, intelligence and praxis is recognized through this award. On behalf of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests members, I would like to present Dr. Narayan Kaji Shrestha with the top prize for the 2012 CPF Wangari Maathai Award and present him this certificate as a symbol of our appreciation for his long-standing efforts. Kaji please.

The second person CPF would like to recognize is a newcomer to the international forestry world, Ms. Kurshida Begum of Bangladesh. She has shown exceptional strength in helping women in her village of Kerontali to preserve the forests and biodiversity of the Tenkaf Wildlife Sanctuary. During the inception of the Nishorgo Network – a co-management platform for nature conservation - Ms. Begum took a bold initiative by forming a female Community Patrol Group with 28 women and Forest Guards

from the Forest Department to share the responsibility of protecting the Tenkaf Wildlife Sanctuary against poaching and illegal logging. Ms. Begum is the leader of the Community Patrol Group for women, and as a result, became an elected member of a local government unit in Bangladesh. Ms. Begum's work has helped women gain an effective voice in their community, provided women with a steady source of income and helped her communicate the importance of forest and natural resource issues to visitors to the Teknaf Wildlife Sanctuary. Ms. Begum has been recognized as a pioneer and inspiration to young women in her community and has also been proposed by the Wangari Maathai Award jury as this year's Honorable Mention prize winner. I would now like to invite Ms. Kurshida Begum, who was nominated by Mr. Ram Sharma, to receive this certificate symbolizing the outstanding contributions she has made and our appreciation for her work. Ms. Begum please.

Thank you both for your outstanding efforts for the world's forests and for being an inspiration to your communities. I am sure that if Wangari Maathai were here today she would applaud and thank you for your work as well. I would like to invite Prof. Stephen Kiama Gitahi to say a few words on her behalf.